

depression—rather than in the evenings, the 'sundowner syndrome' of dementia.

If there is doubt over the diagnosis, a trial of treatment with SSRIs is recommended. Medication should be given for three months and the patient then reassessed. If an improvement is seen, treatment should continue for at least two years. Such a response to treatment, with perhaps recovery of independence is very rewarding. Unfortunately, long-term prognosis is not favourable: a proportion of such patients will develop an actual dementia some years later⁶.

Conclusion

Although the tricyclics seem cheaper if one only looks at the cost of the drug, it is unlikely that many elderly people with physical illness can tolerate a therapeutic dose of these antidepressants. In addition, the increased costs of caring for depressed elderly people—with longer stays in hospital, support required within the home, and increased strain on relatives and carers perhaps leading to entry into residential care—emphasise the cost effectiveness of appropriate treatment of the depression.

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The National Depression Campaign

A new campaign is being launched on 22 April to raise awareness of the burden of illness caused by depression. The National Depression Campaign aims to help sufferers, carers and health professionals to improve recognition and treatment of this common mental health problem.

For more information about the campaign, contact:

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